ideas**outside**

GO ON, IT'S THE WEEKEND, SO GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY

150 **Gorgeous garden makeover**

A landscape designer works his magic on a Sydney garden so its busy owners can now spend time enjoying their outdoor space, not maintaining it

Poolside pleasures

The owners of this Sydney garden wanted an area to read a book while watching the kids play in the pool. Landscape designer Matt Leacy used spotted gum for the seating and decking area. The *Dichondra* 'Silver Falls' plants spill over and soften the timber. *Turn the page for more.* →

Made to measure **bench cushion** in Mokum "Acacia Stripe" outdoor fabric in Indigo, **scatter cushion** in Mokum "Arabesque" outdoor fabric in Sapphire (at back), and Loft occasional cotton **cushion**, each from $160, Terraceoutdoorliving.com.au

BEFORE

Bare 'n' boring

"The area was quite drab as it consisted mainly of rendered walls and tiles," Matt Leacy says. "This did, however, give us the ability to cut and change some of these walls and use them as backdrops for our plantings."

easy COASTAL GARDEN

A blank-canvas garden is transformed into a perfect **lush & low-maintenance** entertainer's oasis by the sea

THE HOUSE was large, near the beach in Sydney's Curl Curl, and recently renovated – but the garden was uninspiring. So the homeowners sought professional help and enlisted landscape designer Matt Leacy of Landart Landscapes (Landart.com.au) to create a coastal garden they could enjoy and use for entertaining while not having to spend every weekend on maintenance.

STARTING POINT

"The clients had only recently moved in at the time of the first consultation so they were not entirely certain of how the space could be used," Matt says. "All they knew was that they wanted a functional, contemporary space that softened the building, and being a very busy couple they wanted to spend their time enjoying the garden, with minimal time maintaining it. They also needed a good kitchen/barbecue area as they entertained a lot."

Once Matt took note of the clients' must-haves, he considered the pool fence. "I find this can have a considerable impact on the layout," he says. "Deciding early how you are going to hide or disguise this is really important because it can influence the whole design. There are a lot of tricks that can be used to make it disappear without compromising safety standards." Within this outdoor space, he incorporated the pool fence into a seating area (see page 153). →

Tree aloe *Aloe barberae*

Sedge *Carex*

writer natalie walton | **photography** jason busch | **styling** paul joseph hopper

AFTER

Coastal cool

A mixture of natives and exotics were selected for the garden. "They were all chosen for their contrasting colours and form as well as their hardiness," Matt says. "The 500-litre *Aloe barberaes* were used to create impact and interest as well as frame the off form concrete landings that lead to the pool."

La Perla **chair** in White, $550, and Resin ball **planter** in Blue, $195; holding *Philodendron* 'Congo' **plant**, $95, Terrace.

POOL SEATING & STORAGE

While the pool and the surrounding paving and coping (the covering of the wall) were existing features of the garden, Matt wanted to ensure the area was aesthetically consistent to the changes he made to the rest of the outdoor area. Therefore, he used the same spotted gum timber to create bench seats. "Also, stacked illuminated timber boxes were created to break up and soften the existing stackstone wall," Matt says. "This area can be used for casual drinks and a chat or alternatively we designed some automatic backrests, which – with the push of a button – rise up out of the bench seating transforming it into a large sunlounge," he adds.

As for the maintenance, the timber only requires oiling once or twice a year, depending on the preferred finish. "Good drainage, preparation and conditioning of the soil was the key to the plants' fast growth," Matt adds. "The most crucial factors in creating a successful landscape are all in the preparation; the things you can't see." →

Dichondra argentea **'Silver Falls'**

Sedge grass *Dianella*

Sunny spot
A seating area that gets sun all day long was created along the back boundary beside the pool. *Metrosideros* 'Fiji Fire' – a hardy plant that does well in coastal plantings and has attractive year-round foliage – was used.

Metrosideros vitiancensis **'Fiji Fire'**

BEFORE

Lacklustre lawn (right)
It just goes to show that a boring garden can let down even the most stylish of homes. The house maybe renovated but the garden needs a revamp!

Tuckeroo *Cupaniopsis anacardioides*

spotted gum only needs oiling about once a year!

Lounging around
An adjustable seating area was added in place of the spa, which was moved closer to the house and sunk into the deck. The glass fence complies with safety regulations relating to pools and also allows people to feel connected to the barbecue area, which is situated behind (closer to the house).

Elevated position
A deck area was built off the house, which created a platform to look down towards the garden and pool.
Zara synthetic rattan **hanging chair** in White, $799, and Bamboo **lantern**, $150, Terrace.

SPA STYLE

The spa was originally above ground and next to the pool (see "before" photo on page 152). It wasn't possible to build it in and hide it in that area, so Matt moved it closer towards the house and sunk it into the newly built deck. To create privacy in this zone he planted quick-growing clumping bamboo to shield the area from nearby neighbours. The aloe trees were also planted to provide a screen as well as shelter. They are 500-litre-pot trees, and were winched down three flights of stairs. While these clients used their existing spa, Matt normally recommends a custom-made formed concrete spa, which can be left natural or tiled with a mosaic.

how to: | create a coastal garden

The conditions that a coastal environment presents will affect the types of plants you can grow. Matt Leacy from Landart.com.au advises to consider the following:

1. Are you "**frontline salt**"? That is, are you directly in front of the water or beach? If you are, this greatly restricts the amount of plants and types you can use.
2. Does the existing **soil type** or sand you will be planting into contain salt? If it does then you will need to plant something that is used to growing on coastal sand dunes. Walk along the beach or closest headland and this will give you an indication as to what will work.
3. **Wind direction** and the harshness of it has a big impact on the health of any plant, especially if they are exposed to a strong southerly.

BARBECUE FEATURE

One of the key considerations for Matt when designing the garden was creating an area with a decent-sized kitchen and barbecue area. For the benchtop he used a polyurethane composite and fronted the cabinet with a 40mm spotted gum slat, which was also used on the shade structure above. The Wildcat woodfired pizza oven is used a lot when the homeowners entertain outdoors. A bench seat, which almost appears to float, was added so that the eating area was not divided from the spa and garden zones.

Outdoor kitchen
A screen shade was added above the barbecue area. The new high-gloss Metaline splashbacks by Laminex could be a good option for an outdoor kitchen as they are designed for wet areas and outdoor use.
Heaven **stool** in Mokum "Maroc" outdoor fabric, $695, Heaven **side table** with tempered glass top, $795, and Edith wire **candleholders**, from $55 each, Terrace.